



Violence and Teen Dating

As a teenager you may sometimes feel caught in the middle – stuck between being a young adult and being a kid. During this time of confusion and self-examination, the opposite sex is probably becoming more attractive to you and most likely you're beginning to date and develop romantic relationships. Serious relationships can be complicated and confusing enough without adding the threat of abuse, but for many teens this potential threat is a very serious reality.

Did you know that one in three high school students have been or will be involved in an abusive relationship?¹ Think about that. Out of three students walking down the hallway past your locker at school, one of them has or will have an abusive boyfriend or girlfriend.

Now consider that 40% of teenage girls between 14 and 17 say they know someone their age who has been hit or beaten by a boyfriend.² You may think you know everything there is to know about dating, but in reality teens are inexperienced and have 'romantic' views about love. These two factors can set many up for disastrous relationships with grave consequences.

Young men may have distorted notions of manhood. Many may think that being a "man" means they have the right to control their partners in any way necessary or that they should demand intimacy from their girlfriend. Young women in turn often believe that they are responsible for solving their relationship problems or that their boyfriend's jealousy and possessiveness is 'romantic.' These preconceived ideas can quickly lead to dating violence.

¹ Bureau of Justice Special Report: Intimate Partner Violence, May 2000.

² Bureau of Justice Special Report; Intimate Partner Violence, May 2000.

When you think about violence and dating you probably think immediately about physical abuse, but abuse does not always have to involve hitting and slapping. Dating violence can take many forms, including psychological and emotional abuse as well as sexual abuse. All of these types of abuse can occur in the context of casual dating, like meeting someone at the movies for a date or a serious long-term relationship.

Physical Abuse

Scenario: Jeff's reputation for being a physical and hotheaded individual was known all over school. It was a reputation he'd had ever since rumors about him hitting his last girlfriend surfaced. Somehow, Sarah didn't care. In her eyes Jeff had everything going for him. He was captain of the ice hockey team, a good student and had a full ride to college. She had been in love with him since the first grade, and, in her mind, the rumors about his temper could never be true. So when Jeff asked Sarah out on a date for Friday night, she immediately said yes – jumping at the chance to be seen with one of the cutest and most popular boys in school.

The date started like any normal date. Jeff picked up Sarah in his remodeled old Mustang, and they went to dinner and a movie. At dinner, Jeff was sweeter than Sarah could have imagined, holding the door for her and pulling out her chair. But at the movies things took a drastic turn. When he suggested seeing a horror film that Sarah wasn't interested in seeing, Jeff grabbed her arm and pulled her out of line. He told her that she couldn't always get her own way and that they were seeing the movie he picked. Sarah became afraid and when she told Jeff to take her home he slapped her across the face, grabbed her arm again and pulled her to the car.

At the end of the date, Sarah had multiple bruises on her arms, a black eye, Jeff's hand print across her face and the memory of the worst date ever.

Analysis: Sarah and Jeff's date is a dramatic example of physical abuse within the context of casual dating. It is important to remember that physical abuse along with any type of abuse can occur whether you have been seeing someone for months or whether you are out on a first date with someone. Sarah was aware of Jeff's volatile history before their date, which should have led her to take precautions before going out with him. If she was interested in giving Jeff a chance, she could have

arranged for friends to be at the movies at the same time she and Jeff were scheduled to be there for added security.

Psychological and Emotional abuse

Scenario: Patrick and Jaime had been dating since the first day of ninth grade. They met while at band camp, before school ever began. Every member of the 89-person band could see the relentless flirting between the two of them at practices. It was obvious to everyone and Patrick was ecstatic. He'd had his eye on Jamie from the moment that he saw her, plus he'd never had a girlfriend before.

At first they seemed like the perfect couple sitting in the back of the band bus on the way to football games. Then Patrick's friends began to notice something wrong with Jamie. Whenever they would be on a group date with the two of them, she would intentionally humiliate and insult Patrick in front of everyone. She would make fun of his clothes or call him degrading names. Her insults would get so bad that profanity would often be included. Patrick shrugged it off and told them that it was just how Jamie was. He explained that it happened all the time. Patrick didn't want to risk losing the only girl that ever showed interest in him because of her "joking" around. He let his friends know that he didn't appreciate their jealousy and told them to stop butting into his life.

Analysis: The humiliation that Jamie would cause Patrick in front of their friends and the insults that she would give him when they were alone are serious signs of psychological and emotional abuse. Gradually Patrick's self-confidence deteriorated. Patrick had been abused by Jamie so much over time that he didn't recognize the changes and isolated himself from friends when they tried to help. Scenarios like this start out seeming trivial, but can quickly escalate and transform into other types of abuse.

Sexual Abuse

Scenario: John and Leah had been seeing each other for about seven months when John brought up the conversation about sex. He felt that since they'd been together for so long that it was time they took their relationship to the next level. Leah felt that she wasn't ready for such an important step and begged John to drop the subject. However, he was relentless in his attempts and constantly pressured her to sleep with him. He would tell her that she was the only one he could ever love and that he'd never met anyone like her, hoping that flattery would help his

cause.

One night after Leah had a little too much alcohol at a party, John brought the subject up again. This time he would not take no for an answer and forced his girlfriend to have sex with him.

Analysis: John constantly pressured Leah to give into his desires even though he knew that she wasn't ready. When someone you know – a date, steady boyfriend or casual friend – forces you to have sex, it is rape and a form sexual abuse. John not only sexually abused Leah by forcing her to have sex with him, but also sexually abused her by coercing and pressuring her to engage in sexual activity.

As a young woman you can help prevent situations like Leah's from happening by being careful not to let alcohol or drugs decrease your ability to take care of yourself and make sensible decisions. Always trust your gut instincts. If a place or the way he acts makes you nervous or uneasy, get out.

Don't forget that dating violence crosses all racial, economic and social lines. Nobody is completely safe from the dangers of dating violence. The majority of victims are young women, but men are also susceptible to the risks. Young women are also more likely to endure serious injury as a result of violence. Therefore, when you're out on a date or when you find yourself in a compromising situation use your head and always have a back-up plan.

How do I know if I am being abused?

Many young people don't recognize that they are in an abusive relationship. The gradual changes that you experience can be difficult to recognize. Friends and family outside of the relationship can see these changes and try to help, but the abused individual usually ignores the advice and further alienates themselves from the people who truly care about them.

Ask yourself the questions below to see if you are in or at risk of becoming involved with an abusive relationship. Remember that abuse isn't just hitting – it's yelling, threatening, name-calling, obsessive phone calling and extreme possessiveness.

Are you dating someone who . . .

- Is jealous and possessive; won't let you go out with friends,

constantly checks up on you?

- Tries to control you by being bossy, giving orders, making every decision for you, not listening to your opinions and ideas?
- Puts you down in front of friends and family?
- Scares you?
- Makes you second guess yourself?
- Threatens you?
- Has a violent temper?
- Loses temper quickly?
- Grabs, pushes, slaps or hits you?
- Pressures you about sex?
- Moves too fast?
- Abuses drugs or alcohol and pressures you to use them?
- Has a history of failed relationships that are always the other person's fault?
- Makes your family and friends worried and fearful for your safety?

If you answered yes to two or more of those questions you are probably in an abusive relationship, or your relationship is in danger of becoming abusive. It is imperative that you get help and talk to someone right away. By shrugging off these warning signs you are setting yourself up for an abusive relationship that may get out of control.

The effects of dating violence go much further than a cut above the eye and a bruise on your arm. Possible consequences include: nervousness, sadness, self-blame, confusion, anxiety, guilt, shame, mistrust of self and others, depression, fear, feelings of worthlessness, terror, death and sometimes even suicide.

Violent relationships can be some of the most troubling and difficult to escape. Make sure that you have a safety plan and get help if you're in a violent relationship. Talking with someone you trust can be more beneficial than you think. Love does not include feeling uncomfortable, awkward, tense or frightened. You are not the one to blame for your boyfriend or girlfriend's behavior, and you cannot change how they act by reinventing yourself. Realize that if you stay in a volatile relationship, the violence will not just stop or go away. The best thing you can do is to trust your feelings and get out.

Always remember: You have every right to say no. No boyfriend or girlfriend has the right to tell you what you can do, what you can wear or what kind of friends you can have.

I think my best friend is a victim of dating violence. What should I do?

If you have inclinations that a friend may be involved in an abusive relationship, don't shrug them off. There are warning signs that can help confirm your suspicions. Watch to see if:

- Your friend shows signs of physical injury.
- Your friend is doing poorly in school or is considering dropping out.
- Your friend's personal style has drastically changed.
- Your friend has lost confidence in him/herself.
- Your friend has quit his/her normal after-school activities.
- Your friend started using drugs and alcohol.
- Your friend has outbursts and mood swings that were not there before.
- Your friend has isolated him/herself from friends and family.
- Your friend apologizes for his/her boyfriend/girlfriend's behavior.
- Your friend gets overly worried about upsetting or angering his/her significant other.

If your friend exhibits two or more of these warning signs, then it's likely he/she is in trouble. You might want to try and find out for sure by approaching your friend and saying "you don't seem as happy as usual," or by asking if there is anything he/she might want to talk about. This is a non-confrontational and indirect approach that may prompt your friend to open up and talk to you about the situation. Try to listen without judging, condemning or giving unwanted advice.

If you think your friend is in serious danger don't try to rescue him/her or be a hero. Talking about relationships is never easy, but you should talk with an adult you trust immediately and try to get your friend help.

Sexual Abuse Among Teens

When someone you know, a date, steady boyfriend or casual friend, forces you to have sex, it is still rape. Date or acquaintance rape is about power, control and anger — not romance and passion. Rape is a complete betrayal of trust and can have long-lasting emotional injuries.

As a woman you can prevent date rape by:

- Talking openly about sex and keep talking as you get deeper into a relationship.
- Be careful not to let alcohol and other drugs decrease your ability to make sensible decisions.

- Trust your gut feelings.
- Check out a first date or a blind date with friends. Insist on going to a public place like a movie or sporting event. Carry enough money for a taxi or drive yourself.
- Don't leave a party, concert, game or other social event with someone you just met.

As a man you can:

- Ask yourself how sexual stereotypes affect your attitudes and actions towards women.
- Avoid clouding your judgment and understanding of what another person wants by using alcohol and drugs.
- Realize that forcing a woman to have sex is rape, a violent crime with severe consequences.
- Never be drawn into gang rape — at parties, fraternities, bars or after sports events.
- Seek counseling to help you deal with feelings of violence and aggression towards women.

If you are or become a victim of date rape, get help. Don't be ashamed or brush it off as something that you provoked. The worst thing you can do is isolate yourself. Don't feel guilty and don't try to ignore it. Rape by someone you know is still a crime and should be reported. Make sure you get medical attention as quickly as possible and refrain from showering or changing your clothes. Above all though, remember that you are NOT to blame.

If it happens to someone you know, believe that person.

Contact the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape for additional information and resources at www.pcar.org.

Statistics on Teen Dating Violence³

- 1 in 3 high school students have been or will be involved in an abusive relationship.
- 40% of teenage girls ages 14-17 say they know someone their age who has been hit or beaten by a boyfriend.
- 30-50% of female high school students reported having already experienced teen dating violence.

³ Bureau of Justice Special Report: Intimate Partner Violence, May 2000).

- Teen dating violence most often takes place in the home of one of the partners.
- 1 in 5, or 20%, of dating couples report some type of violence in their relationship.
- A survey of 500 young women, ages 15-24, found that 60% were currently involved in an ongoing abusive relationship and all participants had experienced violence in a dating relationship.
- 38% of date rape victims were young women from 14-17 years of age.
- 67% of sexual assaults involved date rape among adolescent and college students. More than half of the women raped (68%) knew their rapist either as a boyfriend, friend or casual acquaintance.
- 6 out of 10 rapes of young women occur in their own home or a friend or relative's home, not in a dark alley.
- Women ages 16-24 experience the highest per capita rates of intimate violence – nearly 20 per 1,000 women.
- In a survey of over 4,000 9th through 12th graders, approximately 1 in 5 female students reported being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner.
- 45% of teenage females and 43% of teenage males reported that they had received some form of physical aggression from dating partners at least once; girls reported that their boyfriends initiated the violence 70% of the time while boys reported that their girlfriends were the initiators only 27% of the time.
- 30% of all teenage girls who are killed are killed by a boyfriend or former boyfriend.